



BAY / DELTA

Protection Plan

making every drop count

NEWS CLIPS

compiled by: Bureau of Reclamation
Public Affairs Office, Sacramento, California

BAY DELTA PROTECTION PLAN

On December 15, 1994, an historic agreement between the State of California, the Federal government and interest groups on a comprehensive, coordinated package of principles and actions to protect the Delta was signed. The Delta Protection Plan Principles Agreement was supported and endorsed by agriculture, urban, business, financial, and environmental interests, and the regulatory agencies. The Protection Plan Principles Agreement set several precedents in settling major issues, such as showing that State and Federal agencies can work together to resolve difficult problems and that the Endangered Species Act is an effective tool which can be used to resolve very difficult problems for many species at the same time.

The catalyst for the current agreement came in April 1993, when the state halted its water quality setting process. After this the Environmental Protection Agency was sued by a coalition of environmental groups to promulgate Federal standards, as required by the Clean Water Act.

The crisis over water quality standards in the Delta prompted creation of the Federal Ecosystem Directorate (Club Fed) in September 1993. Club Fed members are the Federal agencies charged with regulatory responsibilities in the Delta. These agencies are the Bureau of Reclamation, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Reclamation provides guidance on the water supply and operational aspects as decisions are coordinated. The Fish and Wildlife Service is concerned with species that reside in the Delta. The National Marine Fisheries Service is concerned with anadromous fish species which pass through the Delta. The Environmental Protection Agency is concerned with the overall health of the estuary.

As part of the accord reached on December 15, 1994, the water user community agreed to fund \$10 million annually for 3 years to help pay for other causes of fishery decline such as those associated with unscreened pumps. In the years ahead, state and Federal agencies will focus, in a coordinated way, on a process of improving coordination of water operations to meet endangered species needs as well as the development of a long-term strategy for the Delta (Ecosystem Management).

Background

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta lies at the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers (the two largest rivers in California). It is the largest inland delta, on the West Coast of North America. By virtue of its topography, productive waters and shelter, the Delta has developed as a center for fishing, shipping, and recreational boating.

The Standards

Three sets of criteria for the San Francisco Bay and Estuary/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta were subsequently proposed by EPA. These include water quality standards and salinity criteria. Initial estimates indicated that on average the annual cumulative effect of the new standards was about 750,000 acre-feet (in an average year approximately 10 million acre-feet are delivered by the State and Federal projects). Of this 500,000 acre-feet was estimated to be a new impact. In drought times, the impact was estimated to be as high as 1.1 million acre-feet, which would be a sizeable impact on exports to southern California and the San Joaquin Valley.

Intensive negotiations ensued between Club Fed and the State with input from the California Urban Water Agencies and representatives of the agricultural and environmental communities on the quantity of water needed to meet environmental needs. A key goal was to meet regulatory requirements with the minimum amount of water and the maximum flexibility to make the integrated plan workable. It was agreed that to comply with the integrated regulatory actions, a total of about 400,000 acre-feet water will be required in a normal water year, and about 1.1 million acre-feet in extreme drought conditions.

Future Activities

A committee of citizen advisors, representing urban, agriculture, environmental, community, and other affected interests will be created. The purpose of this committee will be to provide input to the newly formed California Water Policy Council and the Federal Ecosystem Directorate. There will be joint appointments, with the Secretary of the Interior appointing some and the governor appointing others. It is envisioned that through the use of this collaborative, ecosystem management approach and public input, a long-term solution to ills that confront the Delta will be found.